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ABSTRACT

This study investigated the encoding of animate/inanimate distinctions in the pronominal systems of a variety of Bantu languages. Various encoding strategies are found to suggest that there is a strong syntactic opposition between animate and inanimate object markers in Bantu languages. Restricted positions and obligatory presence are particularly important for object markers with animate referents. The nature of these strategies suggests a possible historical account of the origin of object markers in Bantu languages: object markers arose as a result of the pressure to mark, formally, object noun phrases with animate referents. (Author/MSE)

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Animacy and Pronominal Systems in Bantu

This paper investigates the encoding of animate/inanimate distinctions in the pronominal systems of a variety of Bantu languages. Various encoding strategies are illustrated which suggest that there is a strong syntactic oppostion between animate and inanimate object markers in Bantu languages. Restricted positions and obligatory presence are particularly important for object markers with animate referents. The nature of these strategies suggest a possible historical account of the origin of object markers in Bantu languages: object markers arose as a result of the pressure to mark formally object NPs with animate referents.

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Animacy and Pronominal Systems in Bantu

1.0 Introduction

The origin of object agreement or cross-reference is a linguistic issue of long standing. While some linguists have argued that cross-reference has a pronominal source (Givón 1976, Lehmann 1982, Bresnan & Mchombo 1987), I propose that the origin of the function of Bantu object markers is independent of free-standing pronouns. Data from various Bantu languages suggest that free-standing object pronouns originally functioned as anaphors and that object markers served to cross-reference animate NPs. Gradually, the coexistence of two forms sharing the pronominal features of person, number, and noun class led to redundancy and the eventual transfer of the anaphoric function to the grammatical marker, leaving the free-standing pronouns to be reinterpreted emphatically.

I will begin by looking at how animacy influences the distribution of object markers in Bantu languages. I will then consider the standard hypothesis regarding the development of object agreement and propose an alternative hypothesis based on the notion that the original function of object markers was to formally mark the typologically unexpected occurrence of an object with an animate referent. As for the origin of the form of the object marker, its source may have been a noun class prefix, a demonstrative or a free-standing pronoun.

2.0 Animacy and the Distribution of Object Markers in Bantu

The first set of examples illustrates how Bantu languages

which permit the cooccurrence of multiple object markers restrict their order according to the animacy hierarchy.

human > animal > inanimate (Comrie 1989:185)

Object markers with animate referents have priority over inanimate ones for the immediate pre-verbal position.

Runyambo

1) a. omuséíjá a- ka- bi- mu- réét- er- a
man 3s-TNS-OM-OM-bring-APP-FV
(them her)
'The man brought them (shoes) for her'

b.*omuséíjá a-ka-mu-bi-réét-er-a
(her them)
(Rugemalira 1993:229)

Kirundi

2) a. Y- a- rá- kí- m- pa-ye
3s-FP-TNS-OM-OM-give
(it me)
'He gave it to me'

b.*Y- a- rá- m- kí- pa-ye
(me it)
(Sabimana 1986:70)

Haya

3) a. kat' a-ka-ki-bi-mu-cumb-il-a-mu
Kato 3s-TNs-OM-OM-OM-cook-APP-FV-LOC
(pot banana child)
'Kato cooked them in it for him'

b.*kat' a-ka-mu-ki-bi-mu-cumb-il-a-mu
(Duranti 1979:35)

The animacy hierarchy also determines the distribution of object markers in the following examples from languages spoken in parts of Zaire and Zambia. In the first two examples, the preverbal position is restricted exclusively to animate object markers. Inanimate object markers appear post-verbally as enclitics.

Kiyaka

4) a. baaná ba-thél-ele (mené)[1]
children 3p-OMcall-TNS me
'The children call me'.

b. baaná ba-suúmb-ídí-kyá kití[2]
children 3p-buy-past-c7 chair
'The children bought the chair'
(Kidima 1987:181-2)

Luvale

5) a. Va-na-mu-tambula-vyo
3p-TNS-3s-take-OM
'They have taken them (things) from him'

b. Mwa- ve- cela- wo
3s/TNS-3p-give up-OM
'He gives it up for them'

c. Na-li-fumisa-lyo
3s-reflex-remove-OM
'He has removed it from himself'
(Horton 1949:191)

In a similar fashion to Kiyaka and Luvale, Yansi restricts animate object markers to preverbal positions, but allows inanimate ones to appear either before or after the verb.[3]

Yansi

6) a. basoda ba-ma-mu-siim
soldiers 3p-TNS-3s-stop
'The soldiers have stopped him'

b. taa ma-bi-kamɔn bi-aak
papa 3s-TNS-see c3-them
'Papa saw them (the unusual things)

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[1]When the OM is 1st person singular, the initial segment of the verb stem -tel- is modified.

[2]The enclitic in Kiyaka is composed of a noun class prefix and the morpheme -a, in this case, ki+a → kya.

[3]Because of insufficient data it is not clear if there are restrictions on word order when two object pronominals occur in a clause. The example in (6d) shows a split with the animate preceding and the inanimate following the verb. (I would like to thank Robert Botne for bringing the Yansi data to my attention.)

c. mɛ li-aak fu-kwɔ̀ɔm
1s c5-it TNS sweep
'I swept it (the court yard)'

d. be-siim be, n-kie me **ko-pa** **biaak**
hoes det 2s-want 1s 2s-give to them
'These hoes, do you want me to give them to you?'
(Mayanga 1985:97-98)

Having seen how animacy determines the distribution of cooccurring animate and inanimate object markers in several different Bantu languages, I now turn to a description of the effects of animacy on the case-marking and cross-referencing of object NPs in Swahili, Kikuyu, and Chichewa.

2.0 Object cross-reference in Swahili, Chichewa, and Kikuyu

With respect to object case-marking, the following examples illustrate how Swahili, Chichewa, and Kikuyu mark animate lexical NPs for case in ditransitive clauses. The preposition kwa/kwi precedes animate object NPs.

Swahili
7) Ni-li-andik-a barua **kwa mwanafunzi**
1s-TNS-write-FV letter to student
'I wrote a letter to a/the student'

Chichewa
8) Ndi-na-lemb-a kalata **kwa mayi**
1s-TNS-wrote-FV letter prep mother
'I wrote a letter to mother'

Kikuyu
9) Nĩ-a-twar-ire marũa **kwĩ MũthũngũI**
AM-3s-take-TNS letter prep European
'He took a letter to the European'

The above sentences alternate with the applicative verb form in which the animate NP typically occurs immediately after the verb.

Swahili

10) Ni-li-mw-andik-i-a mwanafunzi barua
1s-TNS-3s-write-AP-FV student letter
'I wrote a/the student a letter'

Chichewa

11) Ndi-na-lemb-er-a mayi kalata
1s-TNS-send-AP-FV mother letter
'I wrote mother a letter'

Kikuyu

12) Nĩ-a-twar-ĩ-ire MũthũngũmarũaAM 3s-take-AP-TNS European letter
'He took the European a letter'
(Barlow 1960:78)

As for object marking or cross-reference, Swahili, Chichewa, and Kikuyu restrict cross-reference to one pre-verbal object NP. This restriction on object marking contrasts with the Bantu examples given in (1) - (3) where multiple object markers may occur.

Swahili

13) a. Ni-li-m-pelek-e-a mtoto wangu zawadi
1s-TNS-3s-send-AP-FV child my gift
'I sent my child a gift'

b. Ni-li-m-pelek-e-a zawadi (mtoto wangu)
1s-TNS-3s-send-AP-FV gift (child my)
'I sent him a gift'

c.*Ni-li-i-pelek-e-a mtoto wangu (zawadi)
1s-TNS-OM-send-AP-FV child my (gift)
'I sent (it) to my child'

d.*Ni-li-i-m-pelek-e-a (mtoto wangu) (zawadi)

Chichewa

14) a. Mavuto a- na- umb- ir- a mfumu mtsuko
3s-TNS-mold-AP-FV chief waterpot
'Mavuto molded the waterpot for the chief'

b. Mavuto a- na- wa- umb- ir- a mtsuko (ana)
3s-TNS-3p-mold-AP-FV waterpot children
'Mavuto molded the waterpot for them'

c.*Mavuto a-na-u-umb-ir-a ana (mtsuko)
3s-TNS-OM-mold-AP-FV children waterpot
'Mavuto molded it for the children'

(Baker 1990:111)

d.*Mavuto a-na-u-wa-umb-ir-a (ana) (mtsuko)

Kikuyu

15) a. Kamau ne-a-rug-e-irɛ mo:do nama
AM-3s-cook-AP-TNS man meat

'Kamau cooked the man the meat"

b. Kamau ne-a-mo-rug-e-irɛ nama
AM-3s-3s-cook-AP-TNS meat
'Kamau cooked the meat for him'

c. Kamau ne-a-me-rug-e-irɛ mo:do
AM-3s-OM-cook-AP-TNS man
'Kamau cooked it for the man'
(Zaenen 1984:200-1)

d. Kamau ne-a-mo-me-rug-e-irɛ (mo:do) (nama)

From the data given in examples (13)-(15), we see that in addition to marking only one object NP on the verb, Swahili and Chichewa necessarily select the animate object NP to mark as an object prefix on the verb in the case of a ditransitive clause. Kikuyu, on the other hand, highly favors marking the animate over the inanimate object NP.

In addition to selecting the animate object NP to mark on the verb, co-occurrence of the object marker with the lexical animate object NP is obligatory in some dialects of Swahili. Chichewa and Kikuyu do not generally cross-reference lexical object NPs within the immediate clause.

The data given here suggest that NPs with animate referents have priority over those with inanimate referents with respect to object cross-reference in Swahili, Kikuyu, and Chichewa. With these facts in mind, I want to turn now to the question of the origin of cross-reference and the function of grammatical

markers.

3.0 Development of Object Cross-reference

The rise of object cross-reference or grammatical agreement is commonly attributed to the reinterpretation of anaphoric pronouns as coreferential markers of an afterthought (Givón 1976, Lehmann 1982, Bresnan & Mchombo 1987). Because this theory has been proposed to account for object cross-reference systems in some Bantu languages (Givón 1976), I will review the basic assumptions of Givón's 1976 proposal in conjunction with some pertinent criticisms and then propose an alternative model based on the data we have seen and on data from other Bantu languages.

In arguing for the development of object cross-reference, Givón (1976) claims that a lexical object NP which initially precedes a clause shifts to an "after thought" position. Subsequently, the lexical object NP loses its prominence and becomes less marked while a coreferent independent pronoun of the NP becomes attached post-verbally. This is illustrated using English in example (16).

16) TS ('marked') AT ('semi-marked')
the man, I saw him → I saw him, the man →

Neutral ('demarked')
I saw-him the man. (Givón 1976:157)

The afterthought process eventually leads to the morphological binding of the pronoun to the verb giving rise to a clitic. Givón attributes the loss of pronominal status to a decrease in information load with a simultaneous loss of stress and of resistance to phonological attrition. He cites support

for this kind of morphological development in non-standard dialects of English and French as well as in pidgins and creoles derived from English and French.

Applying these same arguments to Bantu, Givón uses examples from Luganda, Kinyarwanda, and Swahili. However, with respect to these languages, Givón argues that Proto-Bantu was an SOV language and that this order was apparently maintained for pronoun objects, but not for lexical object NPs. Lexical object NPs were dislocated to the right of the verb while pronominal preverbal objects in Proto-Bantu were reduced to object markers (Givón 1975:65).[4]

At this point I want to consider two weaknesses of Givón's hypothesis before embarking on an alternative proposal (Wald 1979, Hyman & Duranti 1982). First, Givón's study disregards some crucial data from another sub-branch of the Niger-Congo phylum. His reconstruction is based on only one sub-branch of Bantu. Unfortunately, this is an inadequate sampling since according to Hyman & Duranti (1982:235) most of the languages of the numerous sub-branches of Northwest Bantu show little or no trace of clitics.

Object pronouns in the northwest Bantu languages generally

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[4]Givón's proposal is based on prior work in which he posits an original SOV word order for Proto-Bantu (cf. Givón 1975). In support of Givón's early work, Hyman (1975) argues that Proto-Bantu drifted from an SOV to an SVO word order as the need to add or clarify information necessitated further utterances after the verb. This notion, however, is not without controversy since Heine and Reh (1984:187) argue that SVO and not SOV is the original Proto-Niger-Congo word order.

occur immediately after the verb and not before, as shown in the following examples from Basaa.[5]

Basaa

17) a. Mɛ nlɛ̀mbɛ̀l nyɛ́ bijɛ̀k (*bíjɛ̀k nyɛ́)
I cooked-AP him food food him
'I cooked him food'

b. Mɛ nlɛ̀mbɛ̀l gwɔ máŋgɛ̀ / máŋgé gwɔ
I cooked-AP it child child it
'I cooked it (for) the child'

c. Mɛ nlɛ̀mbɛ̀l nyɛ́ gwɔ / (*gwɔ nyɛ́)
I cooked-AP him it it him
'I cooked him it'
(Hyman & Duranti 1982:236)

Post-verbal word order in Basaa favors pronouns before lexical object NPs. However, as (17b) illustrates, the noun may occur before a pronoun when the noun functions as a beneficiary.

Furthermore, the SVO word order in the Basaa data suggests that Proto-Bantu may have split into two groups, SVO and SOV, prior to the development of an object marker.

A second weakness of Givón's hypothesis is an inadequate examination of current cross-referencing facts in eastern Bantu languages. The data in this paper suggest that the occurrence of the object marker in Swahili is not simply a question of marking a dislocated NP functioning as an afterthought. This observation is consonant with one drawn by Wald (1979) in a similar study on object cross-reference for a dialect of Swahili spoken in Mombassa. He claims that a performance error in discourse is an

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[5]Tùnɛn, like the northwest Bantu languages, is spoken along the Bantu line and has only one pronoun paradigm. However, its word order is SOV. Hyman & Duranti (1982:235) claim that Tùnɛn is not a counterexample since "there is considerable evidence that Tùnɛn has innovated this SOVX word order..."

unlikely trigger for the systematic occurrence of a post-verbal or dislocated object NP.

The data given in examples (13)-(15) for Swahili, Chichewa, and Kikuyu suggest that object cross-reference is regularly triggered by the presence of an object NP with an animate referent. Because "...the most natural kind of transitive construction is one where the A[gent] is high in animacy and definiteness, and the P[atient] is lower in animacy and definiteness", the presence of an animate object NP is typologically unexpected and, therefore, formally marked (Comrie 1989:128).

In light of these facts, I propose that the function of the Bantu object marker was an innovation and not the result of retaining a phonologically reduced anaphoric pronoun. Bantu object markers appeared as a consequence of the pressure to signal the markedness of animate object NPs. In other words, the presence of object NPs high in animacy was sufficiently salient to be marked formally, since it signalled a general reversal of causal information flow, i.e. from more to less animate and from more to less definite (Comrie 1989:128).

This assumption of independent functional origins for the Bantu object marker and the free-standing pronoun entails the following syntactic functions: initially, object markers cross-referenced NPs high in animacy while independent pronouns functioned solely as anaphors. Gradually, object markers were reinterpreted as anaphors as the coexistence of the object marker

and the independent pronoun became redundant since both forms shared person, number, and noun class features. This redundancy eventually led to the adoption of a contrastive function by the independent pronoun. Even though object markers were eventually analyzed as anaphors or arguments, the drive to sustain an opposition between animate and inanimate NPs favored maintaining the original cross-referencing function in addition to the adopted anaphoric one.[6]

Evidence in favor of this proposal is the fact that northwest Bantu languages, which have no bound pronominals or coreferential markers, restrict their independent pronouns to anaphoric functions. In addition, languages which have a pronominal paradigm consisting of object markers and independent pronouns such as Kikuyu, Swahili, and Chichewa restrict their object cross-reference slot to one. A single object cross-reference slot suggests a significant functional difference between object markers and independent pronouns representing arguments.

The independent origin of object markers in Bantu languages has also been suggested by Hyman & Duranti (1982):

> ...it is also possible that PB (Proto-Bantu) did not have clitics--that is, that it either had full object pronouns or, more likely, that it only had [+human] object pronouns. The hierarchies [semantic-case and person-animacy] that have been exposed in this paper would therefore have come into being as a result of innovating clitics and the OM position

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[6]While no clear evidence exists as to the origin of the form of the object marker, it is highly possible that its derivational source was either a class prefix, a demonstrative, or an independent pronoun.

itself! (Hyman & Duranti 1982:235).

Their claim is supported by the data we have seen from Basaa. This language, unlike the four eastern Bantu languages in the present study, is limited to a single pronoun paradigm to express certain grammatical relations. In other words, northwest Bantu languages have a set of independent or free-standing pronouns (derived from demonstratives), but not a complementary set of bound or coreferential forms such as the object markers of Swahili, Kikuyu, and Chichewa.

These facts suggest that the Bantu languages which have developed a dual pronominal system show greater sensitivity to the animacy hierarchy as exhibited in their object case-marking and cross-reference facts. Hence, the features which are inherently encoded in the Bantu noun class system, animacy and number, interact intimately with the grammatical properties and pronominal forms of these languages.

The origin of object cross-reference as proposed here accounts for a diversity of syntactic phenomena which Givón's (1976) proposal leaves unexplained. First, by assuming that the initial function of object markers was grammatical and that an anaphoric function was subsequently adopted, it is possible to account for the grammatical and anaphoric function of object markers in Bantu. Second, the proposal explains the interdependency of the animacy hierarchy and object markers: object markers with animate referents have access to preferred positions. Third, it accounts for the emphatic function of

independent pronouns in eastern Bantu languages as illustrated in examples (19)-(21). And finally, it accounts for the obligatory presence of object markers with animate referents in some Bantu languages.[7]

In conclusion, I have questioned the plausibility of Givón's after-thought model as sufficient motivation for syntactic change. Rejecting this model and its underlying assumption, that Bantu object markers represent the retention of a phonologically reduced pronoun in a dislocated structure with the dislocated NP functioning as an afterthought, I have proposed an alternative model.

The alternative model assumes that the origin of the function of object markers was an innovation in selected languages and independent of free-standing pronouns. The data we

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[7]Kikuyu regularly drops inanimate object markers.

1) a. Nĩ-w-ona
AM-2s-see (AM=assertion marker)
'Did you see (it, them)?'

b. A-kĩ-gũra mũgũnda, a-gĩ-tũgũta, a-kĩ-rĩma
3s-TNS-buy garden 3s-TNS-clear 3s-TNS-cultivate
'He bought a garden-plot and cleared (it) and cultivated (it)'
(Barlow 1960:266)

Swahili must drop the reference to an inanimate object when the marker is in competition with an animate one.

2) ...yule kijana a-li-fungua mkoba wake na ku- toa
dem youth 3s-TNS-open bag his and inf-take out

ma-karatasi na ku- m- pa Faraji
pl-paper and inf-3s-give Faraji
'the youth opened his bad and took out (some) papers and gave (them) to Faraji
(Adam 1979:62)

have seen from eastern and northwest Bantu languages suggest that independent object pronouns originally functioned as pure anaphors and that object markers or bound pronominals evolved as a result of the confluence of two important factors: i) the salience of animacy as a conceptual distinction and ii) the argument structure of a verb such that a ditransitive construction favors the cross-referencing of an object NP with a human referent.

This model also assumes that object markers with animate referents continued to maintain their original cross-reference function in addition to a subsequent anaphoric one. As independent object pronouns were used less and less for anaphoric purposes, their occurrence was eventually interpreted as contrastive or emphatic.

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